



Reviewing why we watch reviews

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A couple days ago my mother walked into my room while I was watching a web series online. She looked at the screen, and then asked what I was watching. I told her it was a web series. Then she asked me who the other people on the screen were. I didn't understand for a minute, before I realised that I wasn't actually watching the original video from the web series' YouTube page, but actually a reviewer's version of the series. In it, the screen is split so there is a small screen at the centre of the bottom edge of the main screen where the actual series is playing, and above that I could watch the reviewers as they watched the series themselves.

After explaining to her who these people were, and reassuring her that "No mum, you can calm down. We can see them, but they definitely can't see us", I was confronted with a question that actually stumped me for a second.

"Why are you watching this?"

Why indeed? Considering the number of views on that video, clearly I wasn't the only one interested. What was so attractive about a reviewer's version of a show, which drove people to choose that over the original, despite the smaller screen size? After some deliberation, here's what I came up with.

IT'S NICE TO HAVE COMPANY WHILE YOU WATCH SOMETHING

Nowadays people are very wrapped up in

their own worlds. We barely have time for ourselves let alone others. In an environment such as this, arranging for friends to regularly get together to spend time simply watching TV is just not feasible. However, almost invariably, we all come back home from our busy schedules and end up alone, watching the series we like or even just casually browsing YouTube for that much needed respite. It's not like we don't want company. We just can't have it.

That's where reviewers come in. While watching a series with them, you feel like it's not just you. They're laughing at the same jokes, and tearing up at the same scenes playing out, and it's just nice in a strange way.

THEIR REACTIONS ARE USUALLY ENTERTAINING

The best reviewers will end up providing you with added entertainment, because on top of the show, you'll have these people who are watching the show with you who will almost always have entertaining exaggerated reactions to cater to their audience.

The best reviewers really enhance the watching experience. For example, if a moment is particularly shocking, you'll get the pleasure of having them pause it and gape at the screen, and you can stare at each other in disbelief. They may even pause the show at times to go into a heated discussion about a particular detail and it provides that wholesome viewing experience when you know that everyone who's watching is really engrossed in the show.

THEY BECOME FAMILIAR IF YOU'VE WATCHED THEM FOR A WHILE

If you watch the same reviewers for some time, you become familiar with their behaviour. Similar to any famous person who you may follow, you start to feel like you know them. And this happens much faster with reviewers because you're actually allowed to hear them have a conversation among friends and discuss themes and concepts of a show, instead of simply getting pictures or updates of their lives. Very soon you begin to laugh at their inside jokes and running gags. Sometimes when you're watching a video and something particular happens, you automatically think, "Oh, I know this person will have something interesting to say about that," just like you'd know for your real friends.

You also begin to get involved in their lives outside of their reviews. If they're a group with, suppose, a couple constant people who run the channel, and other guests who come along who are their friends, you could even get drawn into their group dynamics. Unlike real life drama, you don't actually carry it around with you for the rest of the day, and that's what makes it entertaining but healthy, because no one has got the time or patience for that.

SOMETIMES THEY HAVE GREAT UNEXPECTED INSIGHT

There are reviewers out there who are quite talented themselves. A lot of them are trying to get into the industry themselves and are doing this as a stepping stone. These people

sometimes have unexpected, yet really great insight. There are channels that will break down the content they watch according to what was good and what wasn't.

They'll talk about things that we, as a casual audience member, won't notice. Unless you're an enthusiast, you might not notice what makes a good show, well, good. Sure, you'll know about acting, and writing, but mostly, that'll be the extent of it. Therefore, a breakdown where someone talks about why certain camera angles are best for certain shots, how the music was tuned to emphasise a sense of foreboding, or how there are Easter eggs thrown around in an episode to act as allusions for what's about to happen can be thoroughly fascinating. And it's very different from simply watching a random video about such things, because here you're connected to the reviewer, and it almost feels like getting knowledge from a friend instead of a stranger. Plus, reviewers frame this information in a much more engaging way than your average "Five things you might have missed in..." videos.

By now I'm pretty sure half my readers think I'm an absolute loner. I'm also pretty sure that you guys are planning on watching TV alone today. I'm just saying that it's a lot more fun to watch alongside some other like-minded people. Don't judge me before you've given it a go.

Rabita Saleh doesn't believe she's the only one who enjoys watching shows with reviewers. Prove her right at rabitasaleh13@gmail.com